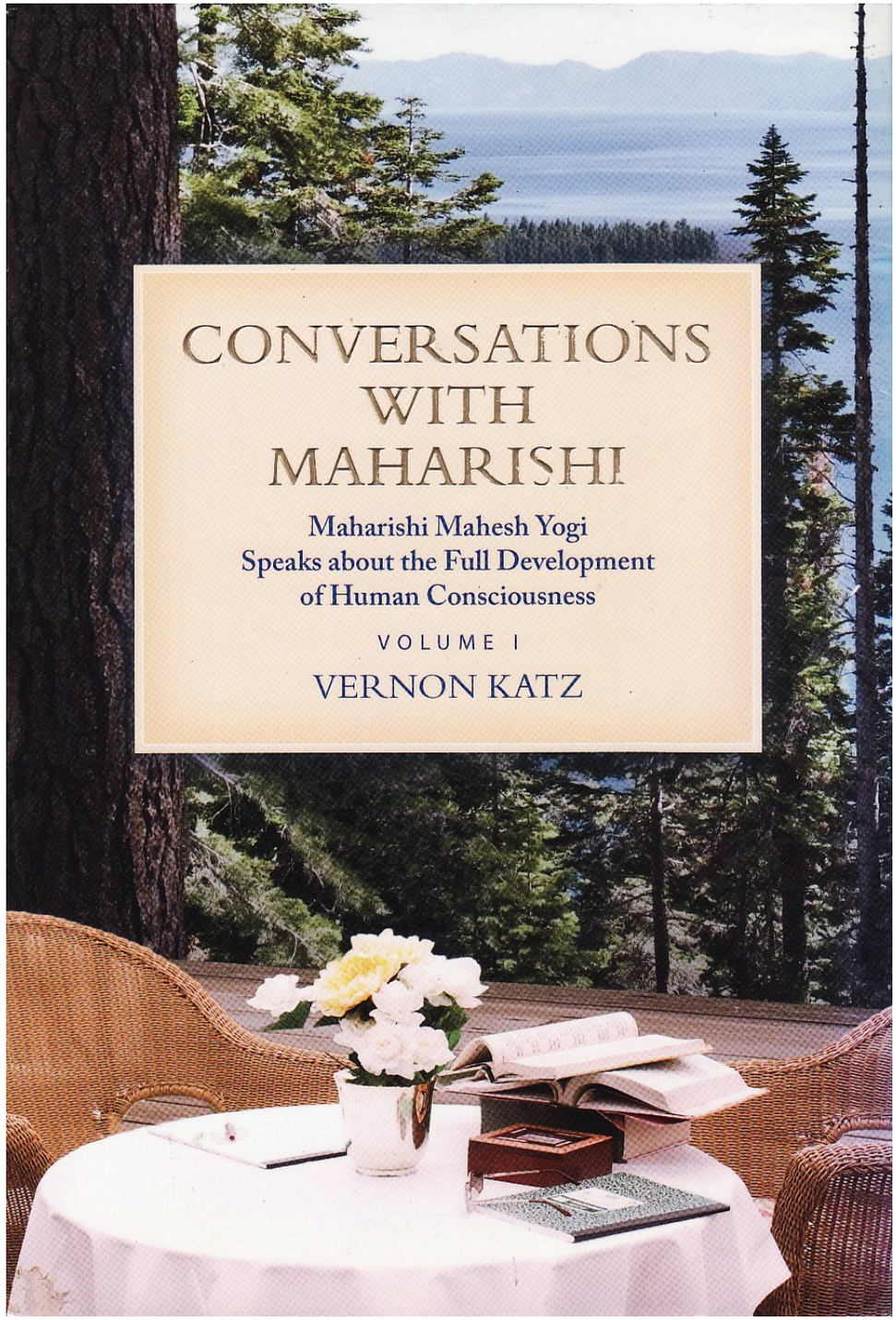
CONVERSATIONS
WITH
MAHARISHI
Maharishi Mahesh Yogi
Speaks about the Full Development
of Human Consciousness
VOLUME I
VERNON KATZ

The Brahma Sūtra

The text around which the conversations centre, the Brahma Sūtra, came as quite a change after the poetic riches of the Bhagavad-Gītā. The sūtra is a favourite form in Indian classical literature. It consists of a string ('sūtra' literally means 'thread') of aphorisms — short, highly compact expressions with an infinitely expanded range of meaning: 'an ocean of knowledge contained within a drop'.[3] These terse phrases and sentences form a shorthand language designed to convey the essence of a teaching in a way that is easy to memorize and hand down to future generations. It is not always quite so easy for future generations to decipher the meaning. The true sūtra is elliptical, stripped of inessentials — there are very few verbs — and provides a happy hunting-ground for commentators, and commentators on commentators.

There are sūtras on every kind of topic from grammar to astrology. Each of the six classical systems of Indian philosophy

3 Humboldt State College, California, 17 August 1971.

— Nyāya, Vaisheshika, Sāṁkhya, Yoga, Karma Mīmāṁsā, and Vedānta — is based on sūtras ascribed to the system's traditional founder and stating its principal tenets in a concise form.

Each such expression is also known as a sūtra, hence the use of the plural, Brahma Sūtras, Yoga Sūtras, etc., as well as Brahma Sūtra, Yoga Sūtra. In the text I use capitals when referring to the Brahma Sūtra, or Sūtras, as a whole, and lower case when referring to particular sūtras. The Brahma Sūtra, or Vedānta Sūtra as it is also called, is the fundamental text of the sixth of the six systems, the Vedānta, and its author, Bādarāyaṇa, is traditionally identified with the great Vyāsa, who gathered together the Veda and other ancient texts.[4] The six systems are known as 'darshaṇas', 'cognitions', or 'points of view', which indicates that they are regarded as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Each has its own job to do and does it to perfection. Each gives us the criteria for understanding some aspect of the truth. Maharishi has said that for knowledge to be complete, correct, and useful, it must be verified by each of the six systems.[5]

According to Maharishi, as I understand him, the Nyāya Sūtra of Gautama investigates the correct approach to the object of enquiry. Nyāya (justice) is the science of just rea-

4 The Veda (the word means 'knowledge') comprises a whole corpus of texts, beginning with the four Vedas — Ṛig, Sāma, Yajur, and Atharva — and including the Upanishads, which are the source of the Brahma Sūtra (also known as Vedānta Sūtra — Vedānta literally means 'end of the Veda').

5 MBG Introduction, p. 21.

soning. The Vaisheshika Sūtra of Kaṇāda analyses the specific qualities (vishesha) that distinguish the object from other objects. The Sāṁkhya-pravacana Sūtra of Kapila digs more deeply into the object of enquiry in order to enumerate (Sāṁkhya) its ultimate constituents. Sāṁkhya is a dualistic system. It finds that the knowing subject, the life-principle (Purusha), is in reality quite separate from nature, the principle of objectivity (Prakṛiti), and from its twenty-three evolutes, even though the presence of Purusha is necessary for Prakṛiti to evolve. The Yoga Sūtra of Patanjali shows how the knowledge discovered by Sāṁkhya can be brought to direct experience — how the subject can know himself so clearly that he recognizes his complete singularity (kaivalya) and self-sufficiency, entirely independent of and isolated from the changing world of objects. The Mīmāṁsā Sūtra of Jaimini is an investigation (Mīmāṁsā) into the whole world of activity (karma), which has been excluded by Patanjali from the goal of life. Jaimini locates the source of activity within the structure of the subject himself as he is realized in his state of kaivalya. Finally, the Brahma Sūtra, or Vedānta Sūtra, of Bādarāyaṇa goes a step further than Jaimini and finds knowledge to be at the basis of every grain of action. Its 'higher investigation' (Uttara Mīmāṁsā)[6] is able to overcome the duality between the subject and the world of objects, between Purusha and Prakṛiti, by recognizing as their common

6 The Vedānta System is also known as 'Uttara Mīmāṁsā' to distinguish it from the 'Pūrva Mīmāṁsā', or 'earlier investigation', of Jaimini.

basis that knowledge of totality which is able to hold both of them together in a single wholeness of awareness.[7]

The Brahma Sūtra is the king of sūtras, for its subject, Brahman, is the wholeness of life. When, following some commentators, I tried to interpret a sūtra in terms of a particular aspect of life, without reference to its wholeness, Maharishi gently rebuked me: 'These are *Brahma* Sūtras (sūtras about Brahman), not *jagat* sūtras (sūtras about the world).'[8] To know Brahman one has to awaken to that wholeness of awareness which encompasses everything, which leaves out nothing.[9] And when one knows Brahman one *is* Brahman. Brahman is a state of consciousness. 'The reality of Brahman is only the reality of the knower. Brahman is not there without a knower, because it is just that level of awareness … That is why it is said, "brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati"[10] … The knower is nothing other than Brahman and therefore

7 When Maharishi speaks of Vedānta he always has in mind this interpretation of the Brahma Sūtra from the point of view of non-dualism (advaita). But there are other interpretations — see introduction to 'The Significance of Maharishi's Commentary for the Modern Age'.

8 Quote drawn from additional material in the recorded conversations transcribed for this book.

9 'That is the awakening about the Great, the Huge, enveloping everything, leaving off nothing. The entire course of action, the whole unboundedness of the field of non-action — all taken together in one awareness, and that awareness is … the structure of Brahman, the knowledge of totality.' Seelisberg, Switzerland, July 1977. The nature of this wholeness of awareness should become clearer as the Introduction proceeds.

10 'The knower of Brahman is Brahman', MU 3.2.9. The Upanishad says: 'brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati.'

Brahman is nothing other than the knower.'[11]

Maharishi likes to explain wholeness by way of an analogy. 'The whole is something more than the collection of parts. The house is more than the walls, floor, and ceiling put together, but without these components the house will not be found.'[12] We could say that the 'houseness' of the house is Brahman, and that its components are the experiences of higher states of consciousness. Brahman is built up out of these experiences but transcends them, not because it is an empty abstraction but because it is completely full — it excludes nothing.

The word 'Brahman' derives from the root 'bṛih', to grow great, and its present participle, 'bṛihat' — vast, abundant, huge, unbounded. The Brahma Sūtra traces the steps whereby Brahman waxes great in the awareness, until it becomes full-grown as that vast, unbounded whole which is more than the collection of the different states of awareness out of which it has grown. The story of Brahman, therefore, is the story of the growth of consciousness. I tell that story in some detail here because Brahman will, after all, remain an empty abstraction unless it is seen in the context of the states of consciousness out of which it has evolved, the parts that structure the whole. Maharishi sees the Brahma Sūtra mainly as the final pages of the story, but it is difficult to understand the climax of a tale without reading what has gone

11 Conversation, Vittel, France, 19 December, 1973.
12 Lake Tahoe, California, 30 November, 1972.

before. From one point of view, indeed, the Brahma Sūtra tells the whole story. The very first sūtra reads: 'Now from here the desire to know Brahman.' Commenting on it in Kashmir (1969), Maharishi said: '"From here" means, having taken birth as man, having gained this beautiful nervous system. Anything that is born evolves; evolution is natural. Vyāsa wants everyone to evolve in such a manner that the course of evolution is known to himself, not just to drift on the path of evolution like a river which does not know where it is heading. He wants everyone to desire to know Brahman, and then to evolve to that value [Brahman] … The sūtra exhorts us to desire for the knowledge of Brahman, not in the future but here and now. Begin from here, from this moment, from this level of consciousness, from this place … start to desire now.'